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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AND OF THE
PRINCIPAL CHANGES IT HAS UNDERGONE.

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[The following Essay was prepared originally, and delivered by its author as a lecture before a Lyceum at Kingston, and subsequently printed in the Massachusetts Common School Journal. The importance of the subject, as well as the ability, and clearness with which it is treated, will secure for the article an attentive perusal. The teachers of our common schools, where the great majority of the people must receive all the school education they will get, ought to be able to teach the English language, in such a manner as to impart a knowledge of its component parts, and of the transitions it has undergone, as well as its correct use, in speech and writing, as the great medium of communication between mind and mind. Nothing would be more easy of acquisition, or more entertaining to scholars of the right age, than a historical view of their language, with apt and interesting illustrations, drawn from the productions of the great writers, in different periods, of English literature.]

It is sad to think how much of the pleasure and advantage of the intercourse of daily life is abridged from the want of a correct knowledge and use of the "mother tongue." How many terms, and phrases, used in legal and legislative proceedings, public addresses and newspapers, are unintelligible to many hearers and readers, from the continual recurrence of words of Latin, Greek, or French derivation,—words, which might be easily comprehended by all, who had been properly instructed in the changes which the language had undergone, and the common roots, and principles of etymology. We hope the perusal of this lecture will expand the views of teachers, and scholars in the public schools.—*Editor of Journal.*]

When we first begin to make our native language an object of study, we find that it has affinities with other languages, and that a considerable portion of the words we use, so nearly resemble the words of other tongues as to appear to be derived from them ;—and, upon investigation, the English, instead of being a simple language, and unconnected with others, is found to be the very reverse. It is the result of the union of the civilization of many tribes and nations ; in many cases, the fruit of conquest, and in others, of commercial and peaceable intercourse.

It becomes then an object of interest and importance to us to trace its history from its rude beginnings to its present highly cultivated state. It is interesting as connected with our literature, with the history of our mother country and the nations which have inhabited it, and with the general history of civilization. To assist us in our researches, we have not only the ancient and modern authors, with their descriptions of the people who have exerted an influence on its formation, (for their accounts are imperfect, and alone would give us but little knowledge,) but we have also the works of those modern philosophers who, by making the affinities of languages the object of their study, have thrown a light upon the history of times so ancient as to have left no written record.

It will, perhaps, render the succeeding account plainer and easier to be understood, if we should give, in the commencement, the theory which is now generally adopted by the learned, as to the manner in which Europe was originally peopled.

All profane history and tradition point to the East and to Asia as the great source of European population, and thus confirm the statement made in the sacred Scriptures.

It is supposed that the ancestors of the people who inhabit the middle and western part of Europe, came from Asia, in two great emigrations. At the very earliest dawn of history, we find the most western countries,—Great Britain, Ireland, and Gaul, or modern France,—inhabited by a number of tribes resembling each other, in language, manners, and religion, called Cimmerians and Celts, (Kelts,) who are comprehended together by historians under the general name of Celts.* These composed the first great emigration, called the *Celtic*, the precise time of which is, of course, unknown. The people of this emigration were pushed forward by the pressure of the second emigration upon their rear, and were finally expelled by them from many of the countries they occupied. The only present remains of this Celtic race are to be found in Wales, Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Highlands of Scotland, and in Armorica or Brittany, a province of France.

But by far the greater part of the present population of Europe is attributed to a second great Asiatic emigration, commonly called the *Gothic*, which, beginning to move from Asia several centuries before the Christian era,† had, in the time of Julius Cæsar, (50 B. C.,) got so far west as to occupy modern Germany, Holland, and the north-

* See Anthon, articles *Celte*, *Gallia*, *Pelasgi*, *Græcia*, &c. Turner, *Anglo-Saxons*, vol. 1. p. 2, 6th edition, says that Dr. Percy was the first who traced the difference between the Celtic and Gothic tribes.

† Turner, i. 96, 98. Tacitus says the name of *Germans* was a recent name. Germ. 2. Turner, i. 121.

west of Europe. About two centuries after Christ, the people of this Gothic race began to encroach upon the limits of the Roman empire; they warred with it unceasingly, and in the course of a few centuries more, they had overrun many of its finest provinces. The Celtic race and the Roman power succumbed before them.

The population of Russia and the eastern part of Europe is attributed to a third and separate emigration, called the *Slavonic* or *Sarmatian*.

A great part of the population, language, and civilization, of Greece and Italy are supposed to be the result of another emigration, about which, however, very little is known except its Eastern origin. Maritime colonies were probably settled on their shores at a very early period.

Such is the theory, the great outlines of which, with some slight difference as to particulars, are now generally agreed to by the learned. It is founded upon a collection and comparison of the scanty notices which are to be found in the ancient writers relating to this subject of the origin of nations; and what is perhaps still better evidence, upon a study of all the different languages of ancient and modern Europe, tracing them back to their roots or oldest state, comparing them one with another, and observing the affinities or relations existing among them.

Besides the languages and races we have already mentioned, there is the Basque language, spoken by the Biscayans, Navarrese, and inhabitants of the Western Pyrenees, both in France and Spain, which is considered by many who have examined it to have no affinity to any other known language. They are supposed to be the descendants of the old Iberi, who occupied Spain before the Celts entered it. They must be a different race from the Celts, or climate and country, or other circumstances, may have operated upon them, during two thousand years, to have produced their present state.*

We will now give a brief summary of the early history of England, which, although familiar to many, is necessary to a complete view of the subject.

The earliest information we have concerning Great Britain, upon which any dependence can be placed, is from the writings of Julius Cæsar, the Roman general, about half a century before Christ. The merchants of Tyre and Carthage had undoubtedly visited the island much earlier, but commercial jealousy kept them from divulging whatever they may have known about it.

In the time of Cæsar, we find the south part of the island, or England, peopled by a collection of tribes who have been called Cymrit or Bretons; the north part inhabited by tribes, no doubt, of the same race with those of the south, but differing from them in some things.

This population had doubtless proceeded from the neighboring country of Gaul, (now France.) The most southern tribes had probably passed over earliest, and had been driven westward and northward by other tribes following behind them. From the account of Cæsar, it appears, that several tribes of the Belgæ, a people of

* The Basque gave names to many of the mountains and rivers of Spain.

† Pronounced *Kunri*. Turner, 1. 34.

Gaul, but who are supposed to be of Gothic or Germanic origin,* had then very recently passed over and taken possession of the British shores; but the people of the interior of the island had been there so long that there was no tradition of their emigration, and they were said to be "*natos in insula*."† [born in the island.]

That the ancient Bretons and Gauls were kindred nations, and of the Celtic race, is universally admitted. They were alike in their habits, their language,‡ and their religion. Their clothing was skins. The people of the interior subsisted principally on milk and flesh, and planted but little.§ But agriculture was probably somewhat attended to on the coast, and in after-times considerably throughout the island.|| The people of Cantium, (now Kent,) are described as being the most civilized.¶ They used pieces of iron and copper for money.**

The religion of the ancient Bretons and Gauls is celebrated under the name of *Druidism*. Their priests, or Druids, were at the head of civil as well as religious affairs. They possessed all the knowledge of these nations, but committed nothing to writing, trusting entirely to memory. Twenty years were spent in the education of those who wished to be admitted into this sacred order, and this time was occupied in learning a great number of verses, in which their knowledge was embodied. They had a regular system of sacrifices, occasionally immolating even human beings. They decided all civil controversies among the people, and for those who would not willingly submit to their decision, they used a species of punishment very similar to the Jewish and Roman Catholic excommunication. They interdicted the offender from the right of sacrifice. He was then considered *accursed*, his presence avoided by all, and he was completely outlawed and unprotected by society. They believed in the immortality of the soul, which they taught in the doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls. They adored several deities, but worshipped one as superior to the rest. It has been asserted that they adored the Supreme Being in the shape of an oak, or that they adored the oak as the emblem of the Supreme Being; but this is probably a mistake arising from the circumstance of their performing their worship in the open air, under the trees. Their whole system of religion is generally considered to be of Eastern origin, and resembles the Hindoo in some of its features. The chief seat or principal school of the Druids was in Great Britain.††

All these things are interesting as connected with the character of the people, which, of course, will have an influence on their language.

The Celtic people of Gaul, (and very probably those of Britain also,) used the Greek letters, whenever it was necessary to commit any thing to writing. It is supposed they must have learned these from the people of Massilia, (now Marseilles,) which was a colony

* *Cæsar*, *Bel. Gal.* 2. 4.

† *Ibid.* 5. 12; also 2. 4, and 3. 9.

‡ *Tac. Agricola*, 11, 12, 21. *Cæs. Bel. Gal.* 1. 1. Their buildings resembled those of Gaul. *Cæs. Bel. Gal.* 5. 12 and 14.

§ *Cæs. Bel. Gal.* 5. 14.

|| Britain afterwards furnished large supplies of corn for the Roman armies.

¶ *Cæs. Bel. Gal.* 5. 14.

** *Idem.* 5. 12.

†† *Cæs. Bel. Gal. lib.* 6. ch. 12, 13, 16. *Logan's Scottish Gael*, 12, 13. The Druid worship remained in Armorica in the 4th century. *Turner*, 3. 573.

very early founded by the Greeks, and attained considerable political importance. In the age of Augustus, it was highly distinguished for its cultivation of literature and its schools of learning.*

The Bretons are described by the Roman historian Tacitus as being *rutile*, red-haired;† and the whole Celtic race, of which the Bretons were a part, are said to have been *fair-haired*, (and inclining to a red-yellow, or chestnut color,) and they made use of a coloring matter to make it more so. They are described as blue-eyed, and of fair or clear and white complexions.‡

A. C. 55, Julius Cæsar, who then commanded the Roman armies engaged in the conquest of Gaul, on the pretence that the Bretons had furnished assistance to his enemies in Gaul,§ and probably, also, ambitious of being the first to carry the Roman arms into this then almost unknown country, made a military expedition into Britain. He made another the following year, had numerous battles with the inhabitants, and some of them temporarily submitted to him. But his invasion produced no permanent effect.|| Previous to making these expeditions, Cæsar obtained all the knowledge of the island he could from the Gauls, and from the traders of different nations,¶ and the information thus collected, with the result of his own observations, is embodied and handed down to us in his history of his wars in Gaul.

After the invasion of Julius Cæsar, Britain remained unmolested by the Romans for nearly a century. Caligula threatened an invasion, but none was seriously attempted until A. D. 43, when, in the time of the emperor Claudius, a Roman army was sent over, and gained a number of victories; and Claudius repaired there in person, and received the submission of a number of tribes in the south-east part of the island. A. D. 50 and 59, they extended their conquests further north, and so it went on, until, in the time of the emperor Domitian, his general Agricola finally established the Roman power over the Bretons, and, in the year of our Lord 81, built a line of forts from the Frith of Forth to the Clyde, as a protection against the barbarians of the north. A. D. 209, Severus built a rampart or wall across the island, from the Tyne to the Solway, for the same purpose.** The Romans continued masters of England until the beginning of the fifth century, (about A. D. 409,) when they were obliged, by troubles in other parts of their immense empire, to withdraw their troops for defence nearer home.††

The Romans were thus masters of England, (including Wales,) for more than three centuries. In this time they had introduced among the higher classes of the Bretons, the manners, civilization, and

* Cæs. Bel. Gal. 1. 47; 5. 46. Turner, 1. 49. Tac. Annals, 11—13, 14. Turner's England, 5. 279, quotes several authors.

† Agricola, 11.

‡ Logan, 83. 86; Pliny, 28. 12; and Martial, 8. 33.

§ Cæs. Bel. Gal. 3. 9—4. 20. Suetonius, (Life of Julius Cæsar, 47,) says, however, Cæsar had another motive,—the obtaining of pearls, the fishery of which abounded in Britain. Tac. Agric. 12.

|| Cæs. Bel. Gal. Books 5 and 6.

¶ Idem, 4. 20.

** Tac. Agric.

†† Time of their withdrawal differently stated. See Hume. Anthon, article *Britannia* and *Chronology*. Gibbon, ch. 31, quotes Procopius. Bosworth, following Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, says A. D. 409. Turner, 1, 172, 176, 179, says the Roman legions were called away about A. D. 402, to fight the Goths. After that they probably returned, but left finally between 406 and 409. He examines all the authorities.

luxuries, of Rome. They also gave them their laws and municipal institutions.* There is no doubt but that the principal men among them must also have been familiar with the Roman language; but it probably never became so prevalent among the mass of the people as to produce much effect upon their ancient spoken language. The Roman tongue would be best understood and most used in the south-east of the island, nearest to their province of Gaul, and in the north of England, where the Roman armies were continually fighting against the Picts and the Scots. But if it had prevailed so extensively as to have essentially affected the speech of the great body of the people, the consequences would probably be to be seen at this day, even in the language of the modern Welsh, who are the genuine descendants of the ancient Brétuns. But the Welsh language is said to be comparatively free from Roman intermixture.†

By the departure of the Romans, the Bretons were left their own masters. But during their long subjection, they had become used to the arts of peace, and unfitted for war. Besides, the strength of the people, the youthful and enterprising, had been enlisted, and led away to join the armies and fight the battles of Rome in foreign countries, thus rendering them still weaker at home. But, worse than all, their own internal dissensions made them an easy prey to their enemies.‡ They were now attacked by the barbarians who inhabited the north part of the island, and who had never submitted to the power of Rome, nor partaken of its civilization.

Deserted by the Romans, the Bretons invited Hengist and Horsa, chiefs of the Jutes, who inhabited Jutland, and who had either accidentally or for plunder landed, with their followers, on the shores of the island, to assist them against their northern enemies. With their help they conquered; but their new allies were not easily got rid of. Incited by love of adventure and of conquest, they soon became the enemies of the Bretons. Great numbers of the Jutes and Angles,§—two of many tribes which went under the general name of *Saxons*,—came over, and they reduced one portion of the island after another, until, in the course of the sixth century, they had conquered the whole of modern England, and a portion of the south of Scotland, and established there seven or eight kingdoms, commonly called the *Saxon Heptarchy* or *Octarchy*.

As the Saxon conquest was gradual, it is probable that numbers of the Bretons were incorporated among them by being reduced to servitude, or otherwise. But the greater part were expelled from the country, and were driven into Wales, Cornwall, and into Brittany, in France.|| In Wales, part of Cumberland, and in Brittany, dialects of the old Breton or Celtic tongue still remain; and it has been extinct in Cornwall but a few years. Although slow, therefore, the

* Turner, 1. 189. The Bretons probably used Roman letters. Turner, 3. 559.

† Tac. Agric. Observations on the changes the Welsh language has undergone. Turner, 3. 617. Turner, (Hist. of England, 5. 420,) says, there are many Latin words with Welsh terminations to be found in the Welsh language. The Welsh were never a learned people.

‡ Turner, 1. 192.

§ The Angles inhabited the duchy of Sleswic. Turner, 1. 150.

|| Turner, 3. 573. Brittany was before then peopled by a remnant of the old Celtic people of Gaul. The old British remains, also, in a small district of Cumberland. Turner's England, 5. 420.

conquest was so complete that the modern English language is very little indebted to the old Breton. The names of many mountains, rivers, and places in England, however, are still Celtic; and this is probably owing to the circumstance that the conquest *was* a gradual one.

The foreigners who had now subdued England were principally of the tribe of Angles, which was a part of the Saxon nation in Germany. From the union of these two names, the new people were called *Anglo-Saxons*. And from their name, (Angles-Land,) also came the present name of *England*.* The name of *Saxon* itself,* is supposed to have been derived from *Sakai-suna*, meaning *sons of the Sacae*, one of the Germanic tribes.

They are considered by historians to have been a part of the second great Asiatic emigration, commonly called the *Gothic*, (as the first is called the *Celtic*.) This emigration is the source of most of the people and languages of Western Europe,—English, Dutch, German, Swiss, Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish.

These people, sometimes called *Goths*, sometimes *Scythians*, and a part of them, in later times, called *Germans*, are supposed to have entered Europe from Asia about B. C. 680;† and, in the time of Julius Cæsar, a portion of them had advanced so far westward as to occupy modern Germany, adjacent to Gaul. The Goths or Germans differed but little from the Gauls in manners,‡ as they were alike barbarous. But they differed from each other in language;§ and in religion the difference was still more striking. The religion of Celtic Gaul was, as we have described it, a religion of priests and sacrifices, teaching the doctrine of transmigration, and worshipping a number of deities. The Germans, on the contrary, had no order of priests, and no system of sacrifices; and in the time of Cæsar, it is said they adored only visible deities, such as the sun, moon, and fire.||

Tacitus describes the Germans as being remarkably alike in their persons and manners, and free from admixture of other nations,—*truces et cærulei oculi*, [cruel, having blue eyes,]—*rutile comæ*,|| [red-haired.] And among the descendants of these people at the present day, the Danes are said to be red and yellow-haired, the Swedes flaxen-haired, &c.

The German nations subsisted, as before observed, mostly by their flocks and hunting, and but partially by agriculture. Those of them bordering on the sea, as the Saxons did, had another resource for obtaining both food and glory,—by plundering expeditions into the maritime territories of other nations, which we in our time should denominate freebooting or piracy.**

* Bosworth, 37. Turner, 1. 100, 207. A very probable definition of the name of *Saxon*, is from a sword they used peculiar to them. Turner says the Saxons had been in Armenia, and this may account for some Persian roots in the Saxon language.

† Turner, 1. 96. 98. ‡ Cæs. Bel. Gal. 6. 21. § Idem. 1. 47.

|| Idem, 6. 20. As to the religion of the ancient Scythians, Turner, 1. 102, quotes Herod. Melpom. 59. As to the religion of the Saxons at the time of their invasion, see Turner, 1. 218.

¶ Germania, 4. Description of persons of Saxons, Turner 1. 206.

** Bosworth, Preface. Cæs. Bel. Gal. 6. 21. Turner, 1. 446. The first expedition of the Saxons against the British shores was as early as A. D. 368. Turner, 1. 152.

Of all the nations with whom we are concerned in our present inquiry, the Anglo-Saxons are the most important. The great body of our ordinary spoken language is Anglo-Saxon, as, for instance, of fifty-eight words, which compose the Lord's Prayer, only three are of a different derivation.

Ever since the period of their conquest they have constituted the great bulk of the population of England. They were the ruling power in it for more than four centuries. Barbarous as they were, they must have derived great advantages from the Roman arts and civilization, which existed among the Bretons. And the introduction of Christianity among them, which took place about A. D. 600,* would tend to control their fierce passions, soften their manners, and spread among them the learning of others lands.

The Saxons, although divided into many kingdoms, yet acknowledged a sort of superiority in one of their kings over the rest, for certain purposes; and from this beginning resulted their union into one state. This is commonly supposed to have been brought about by Egbert, A. D. 827; and from his time until A. D. 1066,—more than two centuries,—with a short interval, the Saxon sovereigns ruled over all England.

In this short interval of about twenty-five years, the country was governed by Danish sovereigns. The Danes were a northern maritime race, and, like all their neighbors, were expert in navigation, and addicted to plundering. They first landed in England, A. D. 787.† A. D. 851, they first wintered there, and made the isles of Thanet and Shepey their head-quarters for several years. Their inroads were continued until, in 875, they had almost entirely subdued England.‡

About A. D. 880, the Anglo-Saxons, under Alfred, regained the superiority; but they compromised their difficulties with the Danes by yielding up to them, for places of settlement, the kingdoms of East Anglia and Northumberland, which had been almost depopulated by their invasions. The kingdom of Northumberland included the present county of that name, the bishopric of Durham, Lancashire, most of Yorkshire, and a part of the south of Scotland. The kingdom of East Anglia included the present counties of Cambridge, Suffolk, and Norfolk. Here the Danes settled, but not quietly;—there was no permanent peace. Insurrections and invasions continued until A. D. 1017, when Canute the Dane became king of England. They maintained the supremacy for twenty-four years, until 1041, when, by a peaceable revolution, on the death of one of the Danish kings, leaving no one of his family near at hand to be ready to succeed him, the Saxon line was restored in the person of Edward the Confessor, and the Danes, (excepting the soldiers,) remained in the country, and quietly submitted.

The impression produced on the spoken language by these Danish conquests was very considerable. If they had been a *strictly foreign* nation, the effect would be more apparent than it is. But they were a branch of the same great Gothic family to which the Saxons themselves belonged, and spoke a dialect which, although different from

* Turner, 1. 334.

† Turner, 1. 428, 459, 483.

‡ It was not only the Danes proper, but the Scandinavians generally.

the Saxon, was yet akin to it. It is said that in A. D. 979, in the time of King Ethelred, the Saxons and Scandinavians might converse together without knowing each other to be foreigners.*

In the north of England, where they were settled by Alfred in a mass, it is said that the effect of the Danish invasion is still to be traced in the language used there. In the other parts of the kingdom, the Danes were incorporated among the Anglo-Saxons, and the effect would not be so perceptible.

The last great change in the English language was produced by the Normans, a nation inhabiting a province in the west of France.

Edward the Confessor, during the rule of the Danes, had lived at the court of the duke of Normandy, and when, in 1041, he was elevated to the throne, he brought over into England a great number of Norman courtiers and ecclesiastics, used great endeavors to render the language fashionable, and established schools for teaching it.†

Thus the Norman influence and language gained a foothold in England. Twenty-five years after, the Normans invaded and conquered England; and William, duke of Normandy, commonly called William the Conqueror, became king. The motives and causes of this conquest we will pass over, and consider only its effects.

The next inquiry then is,—Who were the Normans, and what was the Norman language? and we shall find that it was indeed a mixture from all nations and all climes.

Ancient Gaul, or France, (of which Normandy was a part,) we have said, was peopled by a nation of Celts, who were akin to the ancient Bretons, and used nearly the same language. This country was then subdued and partially civilized, by the Romans, who ruled it about four centuries, and introduced there their laws, their institutions, and especially their language‡. It was then, upon the decline of the Roman empire, overrun by tribes of the great Gothic race, and thus the foundation was laid of the modern French nation and language.

About A. D. 911, Rollo, a prince of Denmark, and his followers, invaded France, and Charles the Simple, then king, gave them a part of the ancient province of Neustria for a settlement. The former inhabitants were not expelled from the province, but the Northmen who followed Rollo, gradually coalesced with them, and formed one people. To their new country the name of *Normandy* was given. It was governed by its own dukes, and, although a part of the greater kingdom of France, was, to a certain degree, independent.

Thus we see that the language spoken in Normandy, commonly called the *Norman French*, and which was introduced into England by Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror, was composed in the following manner:—

First, of the ancient Gaulish, which was nearly the same as the British.

* Logan 60. There were so many dialects in England itself, that a mere difference of dialect did not prove a man to be a foreigner.

† Hume.

‡ The Roman armies quitted Gaul A. D. 400. Anthon's Chronology. As to Roman colonies in Gaul, Turner, 1. 123.

Second, of the Roman or Latin.* This was introduced into Gaul by conquest and long subjugation. And after Gaul was overrun by the Goths, they were soon converted to Christianity, and the power and influence of the church was a further means of confirming the prevalence of the Latin tongue. The Latin, it is also to be recollected, in its state of refinement, was far from being a simple language.

Third, of the Gothic or Francic, the language of those German or Gothic tribes who came after the Romans.

And *fourth*, of the Danish, which had been brought into Normandy by the Normans. The Gothic and Danish were, however, of the same family with the Anglo-Saxon or English, and this ought to be remembered in treating of the effect of the Norman upon the English.

The Norman conquest immediately gave to the Norman French in England, a certain sort of advantage over the old Saxon. William's Norman nobles and followers were distributed over the kingdom, and received allotments of the lands of the conquered. All offices in the church were filled by Normans, and in those days the ecclesiastics were almost the only educated men. William established schools, also, all over the country, for teaching the Norman, and compelled people of substance to send their children to learn it.† Indeed, the scholars who studied Latin at the schools, instead of translating it into Saxon or English, as is now practiced, were obliged to translate their lessons into Norman French; and this continued to be the custom down to the reign of Edward III., when translating into English was first introduced, about A. D. 1350, by John Cornwall.‡ And by the statutes of the colleges, the students were obliged to converse in Norman French.§

The judges of all the higher courts were Normans. All pleadings in the principal courts were in Norman; the cases were argued and decided and the records kept in Norman.|| All laws and acts of parliament were passed in Norman or Latin, but chiefly in Norman, and never were translated into common English until the reign of Henry VIII.¶

The first statutes which were passed in common English, were in the first year of the reign of Richard III., 1483, who, it is suggested, made this innovation for the purpose of ingratiating himself with the people. The pleadings and arguments in the courts continued to be in Norman until A. D. 1362, in the reign of Edward III. The preamble to the statute 36 Edw. III. ch. 15, recites that, "because the laws, &c., of this realm * * * be pleaded, showed and judged in the French tongue, which is much unknown in the said realm, so that the people which do implead * * * have no knowledge nor understanding of that which is said for them or against them, by

* Turner's England, 4. 205, 313. Many writers have been of opinion that the Latin language, as we find it in the grammars and classical authors, was never the spoken language of the Romans, but only the language of the learned. Gardner, in his Music of Nature, says it is unnatural, unmusical, and never could have been spoken as we now have it.

† Sullivan's Lectures, 370. Hume. Turner's England, 5. 422, 440.

‡ Turner's England, 5. 440. Hallam's Introduction to Literature of Europe, 64.

§ Hallam, 63.

|| Sullivan, 370.

¶ Preface to Statutes at Large.

their serjeants and other pleaders;"—and it then goes on to enact, that all pleas are thereafter to be made, answered, debated, and judged in English; but that they should be enrolled and the records kept in Latin. It was not until the year 1731, (a little more than a century ago,) that, by the statute 4 Geo. II. ch. 26, all proceedings whatever in the English courts and the Court of Exchequer in Scotland, were ordered to be in the English language.

The influence thus exerted for the introduction of the Norman into England, was the greatest that could possibly be, without the actual extermination of the Anglo-Saxon people. The Norman was the language of the court, of fashion, of the schools, of legislation, and the only language used in the administration of justice. The Saxon people were conquered and in subjection, and their language in disgrace. All churchmen and all people of education were Normans, or used the Norman language, and these influences continued to be exerted for ages.

The written language of a people is always in advance of the spoken language, whether it be an advance towards perfection or corruption. The written English of the present day is far beyond the spoken, in correctness. The spoken language of the uneducated mass remains longest unchanged. So it was now. The effect of the Norman would first appear in the speech of the educated and in writing, while it might still be entirely unintelligible to the uneducated body of the people, but its influence would spread as education was diffused, and would gradually reach lower and lower down. But there are probably many provinces in England at this day, where they continue to use the old dialects of their ancestors, and where the Norman has produced very little effect upon the spoken language of the inhabitants.

The change produced in the language was great, and would have been greater but that a large portion of the Norman was of the same stock with the Saxon itself. The Normans settled nowhere in a mass, but were scattered all over the kingdom, and thus the change was more general, and not exhibited in any particular localities.

It is highly probable that whatever Celtic words or idioms we have, are not the remains of the language of the ancient Bretons, who were nearly exterminated or expelled by the Saxons, but were introduced through the medium of the Norman.

It is also generally allowed, that nearly all those Latin words which have become incorporated with our language, and got into common use, were introduced through the Norman, and confirmed in use by the influence of the church and of education.

It is supposed the English language had reached nearly its present shape about or after the age of Henry III., about one hundred and fifty years after the conquest.* The Saxon inversions were generally discontinued, although many of their forms of words and terminations still remained.†

The following is the Lord's Prayer, as it is in Wiclif's translation, A. D. 1380:—‡

* Bosworth, 16, 83, 148.

† Turner's England, 5. 435, 436, and specimens there, 445.

‡ Bosworth, 255.

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In a very large number of other words, verbs, nouns, adjectives, &c., the tendency has been to simplify and shorten them, by dropping the terminations and omitting the inflections which were given them in the Saxon.

One instance of this tendency is, that the final *e*, which was almost always pronounced by the Saxons, and indeed was for some time

* Bosworth, 3. Turner, (*History of Anglo-Saxons*, 1. 234, 239,) is of opinion that the Saxons had a sort of letters before their conversion. Book, (*boe*) is the word for beech-tree, upon which they probably wrote.

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‡ Bosworth, 42, 43.

§ It is curious to observe in the most ancient Saxon manuscripts, the use of an abbreviation, which is still practiced among us in writing, or has been until very lately,—the omission of the letter *m*, and supplying its place by a mark over the preceding letter; as, *thē* for *them*. Bosworth, 44.

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after the formation of modern English, is now quiescent in many words, or not sounded.*

The Saxon, like the Greek and Latin, used certain changes or inflections to express difference of time or tense in the active voice. The English has retained some of these, but the number is very much diminished, (drowneth,—drowns.) The English follows the Saxon in forming its passive voice by means of auxiliary verbs. Many tenses in the active voice were, both in old Saxon and modern English, made by auxiliaries, and our auxiliaries now retain many of the inflections they formerly had in Saxon.†

Different languages have different ways of expressing the relations of nouns or names to each other and to other words. Some express them by prefixes, as the Hebrew; some by inflection or change of termination; others by prepositions; and others by the position of the word alone. The Greek and Latin used both inflections and prepositions. The inflections themselves were probably abbreviations of old words which once had a meaning.‡

The Anglo-Saxons inflected not only nouns but adjectives. The modern English has here undergone a great change. It has omitted inflections in nouns and adjectives entirely, (unless the possessive 's may be called an inflection,) and expresses the relation of words by position and prepositions. This striking change in the structure of our language, is chiefly to be attributed to the influence of the Norman French.§

There appears to have been this distinguishing difference between the languages of Gothic and those of Celtic origin. The Gothic and its descendants used inflections. The Celtic did not. The Erse, or Irish, Welsh, and Armorican, are dialects of Celtic. Erse nouns have very few changes. Welsh and Armorican nouns have almost none, but express relation by position, by particles, and occasionally by a change of initials. We have seen that the Celtic or Gaulish language was a component part of the Norman. This change, therefore, introduced by the Normans, of dropping the inflections of nouns and adjectives, which has so much simplified our language, is to be traced to the influence of the ancient Celtic tongue.||

Again, of the Celtic languages, the Erse formed the comparison of adjectives by particles but before them; the Welsh, by a change in the word itself. The Saxon and other Gothic tongues, formed them by a change of termination. The modern English has followed all; and, besides the Saxon terminations, uses the Celtic particles. This addition is also probably owing to the Normans.¶

The Saxons had a mode of adding to the strength of expression of even the superlative degree, by adding the letter *a* to the end. This was equivalent to, and perhaps the origin of, the modern use of double superlatives.**

The use of double negatives also, which is so much condemned by Lowth, Murray, and the grammarians of the present day, is indispu-

* Bosworth, 40.

† Bosworth, 50, 132, 151, 160, 172, 148.

‡ Bosworth, 73, 74, 197.

§ Bosworth, 74.

|| Pritchard, *Celtic Researches* reviewed in *Quarterly Review* for September, 1836.

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** Bosworth, 100, 177.

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¶ Ibid.

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tably Anglo Saxon. It continued in use among the English for a long time, and is still frequently met with among the uneducated.*

For instances: a royal proclamation of King Henry V., in 1414, for apprehending Sir John Oldcastle: "Be it known as Sir John Oldcastle refuse, nor will not receive, nor sue to have none of the graces," &c.

The statute 1 Richard III. ch. 13, A. D. 1483, enacts, "that *no* manner of merchant, or other person, whatsoever he be, &c., shall bring, *nor* cause to be brought, into this realm, any but of malmesey to be sold, unless, &c., *nor no* vessels, with any manner wines, whoever they be, or of what country they be, *nor no* manner of vessels oil, unless," &c.

The statute 4 Henry VII., ch. 2, A. D. 1487, enacts, that *no* finer of gold and silver, *nor* partur of the same by fire and water, from henceforth alloy any fine silver or gold, *ne none* sell in any other wise, *ne* to any person or persons," but only to the mint officers, &c. "Nor that they sell *no* fine silver *nor* other silver alloyed, molten into mass, to any person or persons, whatsoever they be, *nor* one goldsmith to another."

The statute 4 Henry VII., ch. 3, enacts, "that *no* butcher *nor* his servant slay *no* manner beast," within certain limits.

If taken from ordinary writers, these double negatives might be attributed to carelessness; but in statutes, exactness of expression is always carefully studied.

This change is doubtless owing to the influence of the study of the Latin grammar in England. The Latin language does not admit of double negatives, and the educated who knew only Latin, would therefore, probably, consider them a barbarism. Greek was not studied in the English universities until about the sixteenth century.† If it had been studied earlier, this change might not have been made, as the Greek admits of double negatives.

The greater part of the irregularities, and even what are called vulgarisms, noticed in our language at the present day, when traced back to Saxon times, will be found to be as regularly formed, and as ancient, as any part of the language. In the comparison of adjectives, we have retained some parts, while others have become obsolete. So with many of what are called irregular or defective verbs.‡

Again; in our common grammars, many verbs are said to be irregular in forming their preterit or perfect and participle, but on tracing them back, we find that a great part of these were regularly formed in the Saxon. The greater part of their verbs formed their past tense by a change in the radical vowel; as *ride*, *rode*.§

The tendency of our language at the present day is evidently to regularity in the formation and conjugation of verbs. The number of verbs which form their preterit and participle in *ed* is constantly increasing, and the old forms made by a change in the radical vowel are continually going out of use. This has been brought about by an attention to written grammar, and by the language being made an

* Bosworth, 187. Westminster Review for October, 1834, quotes Henry V.'s proclamation.

† Bosworth, 23. Hallam, 321.

‡ Bosworth, 100, 144, 149, 156, 160.

§ Bosworth, 144.

object of study. The study of the Latin, and the formation of our English grammars upon the plan of the Latin ones, have very much increased this tendency to regularity.*

We see what changes our language has undergone within the time of history. Is it to undergo as great changes in time to come? This is a question which deeply concerns the national pride of both England and America.

The English language is at present one of the most extensively spoken in the world. Our mother country, England, from small beginnings, has grown to a giant size, and encompasses the world with her arms. By conquest she became possessed of Wales and Ireland; by marriage of her sovereigns, she united Scotland to her dominions; and, in later times, her East India company has extended her sway over extensive countries in Asia. By her system of colonization, she has spread her people over large and distant territories in Africa and this western world. The extent of her power and greatness is most beautifully and expressively described in the words of one of our own New England statesmen,—“a power to which, for purposes of foreign conquest and subjugation, Rome in the height of her glory is not to be compared; a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth daily with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.”

The extension of the language of England has almost kept pace with the extension of her power.

England and Wales have a population of	15,907,000	
Scotland,	2,624,000	
Ireland,	8,205,000	
Channel Islands,	125,000	
	—	26,861,000†
British dependencies in Europe,	140,354	
“ “ “ North America,	1,471,473	
“ “ “ West Indies,	891,066	
“ “ “ Asia,	1,157,042	
“ “ “ Africa,	288,613	
“ “ “ Australia,	123,289	
Dependencies of East India Company,	123,301,000	
	—	127,372,837‡
United States,	17,000,000	
Texas, over	100,000	
	—	171,333,837

So that nearly fifty millions of people actually use the language with more or less purity, and, according to some estimates, nearly two hundred millions are ruled by it.

Now, recollect that, according to the best estimates, the population of the whole known world is not far from 800,000,000, and you will

* See History of Grammars, Bosworth's Preface.

† Westminster Review, January, 1842, p. 143. The army and navy are not included in this calculation.

‡ American Almanac, 1841, p. 258.

have some idea of the power of England, and the extent of the English language.

But, as the English language extends, will not the dangers which threaten its permanency be increased? Will it not be divided into different dialects, which will gradually separate from each other so much, that, by and by, they will become unintelligible one to another?

In relation to this, we remark, in the first place, that most of the important changes in our language took place before the invention of printing. The language, as written at the time of this invention, is perfectly intelligible now. The changes which have taken place since, have been comparatively few. They are the result of tendencies which are always affecting all languages, abbreviating forms of speech, and thus rendering it more expressive, banishing from use the harsher sounds, and thus rendering it softer and more musical; and the making of the language a common study has tended to make it more regular, and consistent with grammatical rules.

The change in the orthography or spelling of the language since the invention of printing, has indeed been considerable. But this is the result of the efforts made to reduce the pronunciation of the language to fixed rules, and to introduce a greater degree of simplicity in the representation of sounds. A similar change, and from a similar cause, it is to be observed, has taken place in the French. In English we have probably nearly seen the end of it. There is now a great reluctance to admit any further change.

And in the next place, the general spread of education, which is the glory of the present age, will undoubtedly secure us in future against any violent changes,—against all changes but those which are the necessary results of alterations in the manners, habits, and modes of thinking, of the people. As these alter, new words must of course be introduced, and old ones go out of use. But these changes will be slow, and only to be marked in long periods of years.

It is not a great many years since each portion of our mother country, England, had its different dialect, scarcely understood by the people of other portions of it. But, under the influence of education, these dialects are fast disappearing; and the language, as grammatically written, is every day becoming more and more the language of the whole mass.

The effect of our common English translation of the Bible in producing a uniformity and regularity in our spoken language, and in preserving in use the old Saxon part of it, can hardly be overrated. As it was the work of great labor, and of the most learned men of its day, so it is allowed to be generally a standard of correctness. It is used among us, not only as the text-book of religious instruction, but as a school-book; and there is probably no part of the country where its effect upon the language of the people is more to be seen than in New England.

In the preceding notes, Turner, refers to Turner's *Anglo-Saxons*, 6th ed., London, 1836. Bosworth, refers to Bosworth's *Anglo-Saxon Grammar*, London, 1823. A few introductory remarks are omitted.